

# A TALE OF RED ROSES

A Romance of Love, Bluff, Cash and a "Punch!"

BY  
GEORGE RANDOLPH CHESTER

(Author of "Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford," etc.)

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**SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.**  
Molly Marley, daughter of a well-to-do merchant, has two suitors. One is Bert Sledge, a young man of the city, a rude vulgar of iron will and utter lack of scruples. The other is Frank Marley, a young man of the city, a rude vulgar of iron will and utter lack of scruples. Molly, who is a very pretty girl, is torn between the two. She is torn between the two. She is torn between the two.

## CHAPTER VIII.

(Continued.)  
*The Life of the Party.*

HE symptoms were unmistakable. Molly, having rounded the end of the table, slipped out through the pantry door and handed her remaining envelopes to the intellectual-looking butler to place.

At ten thirty, coincident with the finishing of the ice cream, and while the hectic revel in Sledge's favor wrought by the season passes was at its height, the approaching tinkle of mandolins and guitars brought the happy company to its feet, and before it had gained the front porch four rich, mellow Ethiopian voices were softly intoning "Annie Laurie."

There was a rush and a clatter, and then a hush, and instinctively the young people grouped themselves as nearly as possible to their best liked friends, while, from the moonlit sward, there rolled up the sweet liquid harmony.

A short programme of this sort of music and then the voices stopped, and the seductive instrumental strains of "The Blue Danube" waits set the balmy air a-tingling. In two seconds the wide Marley porch was a tangle of laughing, whirling figures, and the dancers immediately sent in a unanimous verbal request for all the dance music in the world, specifying it by name. Molly danced with Bert and forgot her annoyance. He was the best dancer in the city; her natural partner!

At eleven thirty Mr. Marley, with the worry of eight absent mothers on his own shoulders, was fretting over some invention to send them home, when the earth split open in the wide stretch of vacant land across the street, and ejected into the sky, with a loud unearthly noise, a tremendous assortment of fiery meteors, mostly Roman candles, in reckless bunches, shot up from behind every bush; skyrockets dragged their spiraling tails through all the available circumlocution, while fancy bombs carried their varied patterns of light and pyrotechnical surprises into all the celestial territory hitherto unoccupied.

Through it all, Sledge stood as immovable and as impassive as if he had been glued to the spot and frozen. Even when the display flowed out into the middle of the highway and piled up the street cars for two blocks in both directions, he remained a calm and disinterested spectator. The president of the traction company was thrown into extreme agitation by this excess of zeal, for he had some consideration for the feelings of the public, and he rushed right out to restore the scattered schedule.

"Sledge's orders," replied the demon, lighting the fuse of a red rose set piece. "He said everything went, and it's gone."

Mr. Marley came back.

Sledge was no longer on the porch. Molly had slipped in to wrap up some cake for Baby Peters, and Sledge, who seemingly saw nothing, had followed her.

"Well, is your party a bit?" he anxiously inquired.

"It's a scream," she said, unable to control her laughter. "Really, Mr. Sledge, I have you to thank for the most extravagantly joyous occasion at which I have ever had the good fortune to be present."

"Well, open her another notch next time," he confidently promised her. "Molly, marry me."

"Oh, it's impossible!" she blurted. "Really, I'm sorry, Mr. Sledge, I know it's my own fault, but I didn't mean it to go this far. I don't mean that—that is, I don't know what I mean. You've been so good, and I do appreciate it so, but it is impossible! I simply couldn't. Don't you see?"

"You are around to it?"

"I'm not!" she blazed.

"What'll you bet—Smash against Bob?"

"Anything you like!" she angrily agreed, furious enough to poison him.

"You're on," he said.

## CHAPTER IX.

*Molly Has Her Own Little Plan.*

THOUGHT you were gone," observed Frank Marley, as Sledge opened the door of his den after the dispersal of the party. "Forget something?"

"Loaned my car," Sledge explained. "Is Molly engaged?"

"I'll see," offered Marley, setting forward a decanter. "I think she is still in the library."

"I mean to be married," corrected Sledge.

"Not to my knowledge," replied her father, with a slight frown.

"Humph!" grunted Sledge in satisfaction. "I figure on marrying her myself."

"You!" returned Marley, and the tone was not complimentary. For a moment he looked troubled, and then, smiling again, he poured a drink. "Molly will have the final say about that."

"Sure," agreed Sledge. That she was highly popular was only a corroboration of his own judgment. "Bert Sledge leads the betting, don't he?"

"I've a very close observer,"

# MOBILIZED!

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By Robert Minor



## CHAPTER X.

*An Engagement Without a Kiss.*

BERT, annoyed by the events of the evening, but relieved, to some extent, by Molly's inexplicable and delightful change of manner toward him in this pleasant half hour since the party had dispersed, took his thoughtful place in Sledge's machine, and prepared for the usual welcome silence, which those who knew him had a right to expect from the reticent boss. To his surprise, however, Sledge talked.

"A feverish success," agreed Bert.

"Molly is inclined to give you all the credit for it."

"She can have anything she wants," stated Sledge. "I'm going to marry her."

"Did she say so?" inquired Bert, startled and humiliated.

"Not yet," acknowledged Sledge. "She's waiting for me to say it."

"Oh!" returned Bert, much relieved, and smiling in the darkness. He complacently twirled his mustache. He had a good time of it.

"You're going to see you in the morning about that Porson property?" he inquired, the lady.

"I don't know," replied Sledge. "I'm going to see you in the morning about that Porson property?"

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"Not necessarily," she repeated, and he caught the sound of a repressed giggle.

"You're teasing me," he protested.

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"Then why not close for this property at once?" urged Bert.

"Against the rules," Bozzam truthfully informed him. "Our capitalist won't stand for it. You don't need a diagram of that."

Bert was silent, and for the second time that morning stroked an idea from the surface of his mustache.

"What will you give me for a thirty-day option?" he inquired.

"Five hundred dollars."

"Over and above the purchase price?"

"Well, yes," consented Bozzam, after a moment of reflection. "Twenty-five thousand five hundred in all."

"All right," agreed Bert, and went out smiling. He was a brilliant chap, full of ideas!

Downstairs, he went to the telephone again, and called up the Marley residence.

"Miss Molly still busy?" he asked.

"Yes, Mr. Gilder," the maid informed him.

"She'll be going out for an hour or so, will she?"

"No, sir."

"All right," returned Bert, thoroughly satisfied, and he hurried back to Sledge's office, where he found Bendix, and, going over to the Court House, he spent the next hour and a half sealing, binding and deeding the Porson estate to the shrewd young real estate speculator, who, after a visit to the bank with Bendix, gave up twenty thousand silver dollars for the privilege.

This ceremony concluded, Bert hurried down to the telephone, but did not wait to have Molly called. He only directed the maid to tell her he was coming straight out, and then he slipped on street car, chuckling over his clever plan.

Frank Marley, as he walked into his own residence, was by no means chuckling over his coming interview with Molly, but he managed to save his face to himself by persuading himself that his serious trepidation was grave fatherly concern. He called Molly into his den at the end of the hall and plunked nimbly on to his undoing.

"Molly, I wish to speak to you seriously," he observed, sitting down and motioning her to a seat in front of him.

"What is the matter?" she inquired, instantly concerned.

"Sledge," he replied.

"He has been speaking of me," she smiled.

"Both last night and this morning," he fatherly admitted, pleased with her quiet tone. "He is extremely anxious to marry you, Molly."

"What did you tell him?" she asked curiously.

"That I had nothing to say in the matter, of course," he promptly answered. "Naturally I know what a shock such a proposal would be to you, Molly. But I have too much of a father's care for you not to consider that he is gravely mistaken in his notion of your welfare."

"And are you in favor of such a marriage?" she asked, so dispassionately that he mentally complimented her on her good sense.

"Well, yes," he said again.

"I'm not!" she blazed. "It may seem cruel to me to interfere with any of your business plans, but it is too late to dispose of me."

She sailed out of the room and was confronted by the flushed and excited Bert Gilder, who was too full of important plans to remember that he had certain engagement formalities to observe.

"You say, Molly," he blurted, "have you told any one of our engagement?"

"Well, I'll tell you," he chuckled. "A great stunt has turned up. You know I had a dicker on with Sledge, and he had the nerve to tell me that I'd better stay out of the deal if I didn't keep away from you, Molly."

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